

Endangered Wetar Ground-dove “rediscovered” on Wetar Island, Indonesia

22.10.2008

Scientists working for the UK-based conservation charity Columbidae Conservation have rediscovered the endangered Wetar Ground-dove (*Gallicolumba hoedtii*), one of the world's least known birds, on the island after which it is named. There have been no official records of the species on Wetar Island for 100 years. These initial observations on Wetar are therefore very good news for the species' future conservation as apart from Wetar, an island located in eastern Indonesia, the species only occurs on one other island, the neighbouring island of Timor (Indonesia / Timor-Leste). The project continues; after fulfilling its initial aim to determine whether the Wetar Ground-dove was still present on Wetar, data are now being collected on its distribution, habitat requirements and identify any threats it may be facing.

The scientists report that not only has the species been rediscovered but it is likely to be locally abundant. At one location, the team observed a congregation of 30-40 birds feeding on fallen fig (*Ficus*) fruits – this represents by far the largest ever recorded gathering. The team also reported that another endangered species of pigeon, the Timor Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula cineracea*) is also locally abundant. At the time of writing, 39 new bird species have been recorded for the island. Colin Trainor, who is leading the research team, described the island as “amazing – it has an incredible abundance of pigeons and parrots, and bird life in general. For the Wetar Ground-dove it seems very likely that Wetar is the species stronghold”.

Wetar is a large island (3600 km²) with incredibly steep hilly-mountainous terrain that maintains extensive forest cover (c. 80%) ranging from tropical evergreen forest to tropical dry forest, as well as Eucalyptus savannas and hill forests. Trainor said of Wetar Island “for its size it must be the single most pristine in South-East Asia”. Dr. Jonathan Walker, director of Columbidae Conservation, and project coordinator said of the team's observations to date “its fantastic news - even without yet completing the fieldwork and analysing the data it's very clear that Wetar is a very high conservation priority in the region”.

However, Trainor has also identified strong pressure to develop the island. Of immediate conservation concern is the ongoing construction of an asphalt road, already 12 km long, that will follow valley floors currently covered in pristine forest and open up the interior of the island. For now the team will continue with their surveys of the island and collect further data on the Wetar Ground-dove and its other wildlife, and determine the conservation priorities on the island. Back in the UK, Columbidae Conservation is already planning future work to safeguard this biologically valuable island both for the Wetar Ground-dove and the islands' other wildlife.

Ends

Notes for editors

- **For more information**

Jonathan Walker: jon@columbidae.org.uk / 07766 386 338

- **About Columbidae Conservation**

Columbidae Conservation is a UK-based charity that works towards the conservation of the Columbidae bird family, pigeons and doves, and their habitat www.columbidae.org.uk.

- **Information on threatened pigeons and doves**

Columbidae is the family of birds that comprise pigeons and doves. There is biologically no difference between pigeons and doves; they are simply just two different names we use. There are 318 species of pigeon and dove; 13 of which are already extinct. One species of pigeon, the Socorro Dove *Zenaida graysoni*, is extinct in the wild - it only exists in captivity. Of species extant in the wild, nearly one fifth (19%; 59) are categorised as globally threatened with extinction and a further 13% (38) as Near Threatened. Overall, nearly one third of extant columbids face some degree of extinction threat. Virtually all threatened pigeons and doves are confined to the tropics; depend on forests with over three-quarters inhabiting the tropical forests of Asia, Australasia and Oceania, where 91% inhabit islands. *Gallicolumba*, a genus of terrestrial doves, requires urgent research and conservation attention. Of the 20 species in this genus, three species are already extinct, 10 are threatened with extinction (17% of the world's threatened pigeon species) and three are Near Threatened.

- **Funding and sponsorship**

Columbidae Conservation's Wetar Ground-dove Project is sponsored by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (www.lipi.go.id) and supported by the Wildlife Conservation Society Indonesia Programme (www.wcsip.org).

The project is funded by Columbidae Conservation and awards from:

Future for Wildlife Conservation Fund - Oregon Zoo;

British Birdwatching Fair (Birdfair) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Research Fund for Endangered Birds;

Sophie Danforth Conservation Biology Fund (Roger Williams Park Zoo / Rhode Island Zoological Society);

- **Further information on the Wetar Ground-dove can be found:**

On the species fact sheet in the BirdLife International 2008 online World Bird Database <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/index.html?action=SpcHTMDetails.asp&sid=2623&m=0>

On the species account in Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book (2001).

<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/index.html?action=SpcHTMDetails.asp&sid=2623&m=0#FurtherInfo>

Publications:

Walker, J.S. (2007). Geographical patterns of threat among pigeons and doves (Columbidae). *Oryx* 41(3): 289-299.

Lambert, F.R.; Trainor, C.R.; Xavier, A. (2006). Observations of Wetar Ground Dove *Gallicolumba hoedtii* from Timor-Leste (East Timor). *Forktail* 22: 165-169.

- **Images**

For higher resolution images please contact Jonathan Walker: jon@columbidae.org.uk / 07766 386 338



Copyright Colin Trainor / Columbidae Conservation
Wetar Ground-dove *Gallicolumba hoedtii*.



Copyright Colin Trainor / Columbidae Conservation
Wetar Ground-dove perched, Wetar, Indonesia.



Copyright Colin Trainor / Columbidae Conservation
Forested valley on Wetar Island, Indonesia

Columbidae Conservation is a UK-based charity (exempt status) that works towards the conservation of all species within the Columbidae family, pigeons and doves, and their habitat